

Beading boom

Jewelry-making fast-growing hobby

AMANDA CUDA

When Nancy Wall opened Beadworks in Norwalk nearly 20 years ago, people predicted that a store dedicated solely to beads and jewelry making would have a short life.

She respectfully disagreed. "When people came in originally, they said I would only last six months," said Wall, who lives in Rowayton. "And I said Women will always want to be adorned." "It turns out that Wall, the self-proclaimed "bead queen," had the last laugh. Today, Wall has five other Beadworks stores throughout the country, including branches in Philadelphia, Boston and Providence (the chain is an offshoot of The Bead Shop in London, which started in 1979).

Another change has taken place since Wall opened the Norwalk store. Beading, or the process of creating crafts and jewelry using beads, has become a fast-growing crafting trend in America for people younger than 35, according to the Craft and Hobby Association, a trade organization for crafts-and hobby-related businesses. The association reports one in three crafters now purchase beads. A beading survey by the publishing company Interweave Press, which publishes the magazine *Beadwork* showed that beading supply stores also are on the rise. According to the survey, there are 1,800 independent bead supply stores in the United States, representing 41 percent growth since 1997 and growing at a rate of one to two per week around the country.

Celebrities have even taken up the craft, with starlets such as Kate Hudson, Scarlett Johansson and Lindsay Lohan expressing fondness for beading.

Why the sudden yen for jewelry making? There are many reasons, said Jean Campbell, founding editor of *Beadwork*, who has edited or written 14 books about beading. Campbell, who lives in Minneapolis, was at the Norwalk store last week to sign copies of two new books, "Getting Started Stringing Beads (Interweave Press, \$16.95)" and "Beadworks Creates Earrings (Interweave Press, \$16.95)." She started beading in the late 1980s, and isn't surprised that it's taken off.

"There's a meditative quality about it," she said. "There's something about taking little beads and putting them together. It's like a puzzle."

There are many forms of beading. Campbell likes using seed beads, or tiny beads, to create tapestries. But her new books focus mostly on the jewelry aspects of beading.

Lots of women like making their own jewelry because it gives them the opportunity to be creative, Campbell said. Plus, there are practical aspects as well. "There's also the reality of I can't afford that, so I'll make it myself.' "

Perhaps Wall had it right from the beginning — women will always want to be adorned. And, Wall, said, it helps that handmade baubles are often less expensive than the store-bought kind.

"What's not to like?" she said. "If you're going to wear jewelry, why not make it yourself, and make it cheaper?"

That's a theory that's been embraced by many women, particularly brides. Hope Wright, 24, of Middletown, only took up beading recently, but decided that it was an economic necessity once she became engaged. Wright is making the jewelry for her attendants, as she and her fianc are paying for most of their wedding. "I couldn't do \$95 per attendant for the wedding," she said.

Wright said she lives near a bead store, and has purchased materials there for her creations, necklaces with a pearl in the middle and a Swarovski crystal on either side.

She said she's heard of other brides doing the same thing, and that it's mostly for financial reasons. "A lot of people are trying to do weddings on a budget," Wright said.

But Susan Moffat, manager of the Norwalk store, said that, though economic concerns definitely play into it, the soothing nature of the craft also is a big attraction. "I think that the world is moving faster," Moffat said. "It's nice to slow down and do something with your hands. It's a good way to drown out the rest of the world."

Others agree. One local beading enthusiast, Kristen LaViola, 30, of Milford, opened her own beading store, Manifest Beads, in town this week, because she said there are enough bead stores nearby. LaViola's favorite things to make are jewelry items, including rosaries.

She started making projects with beads five years ago, not long after she was diagnosed with chronic Lyme disease. Her sister got her into it, hoping to reduce some of LaViola's tension. It worked.

"It's a really great stress reliever," she said. "And I never knew I was a creative person, until I started doing this." But beyond the meditative qualities, the decreased strain on the pocketbook and the ability to put someone in touch with her untapped creativity, LaViola said there's probably a very simple reason for beading's popularity.

"It's just a lot of fun," she said.

For more information on beading, visit the new Manifest Beads, 232 New Haven Ave., Milford, 877-7778.